

House Rejects Huge Cuts in Nixon Staff

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By Mary Russell

Washington Post Staff Writer

The House yesterday rejected wholesale cuts in the White House staff and in funds for the Office of Management and Budget, and settled for mild rebuffs to the President and OMB instead.

Attempts to cut the number of top White House staffers from 65 to 40 were soundly rejected as the House heeded a plea not to engage in "political overkill" in the atmosphere of Watergate.

Instead the House adopted a milder proposal reducing the salary level of nine of the highest paid staff members to a level below \$42,500, though it included a grandfather clause protecting the present holders of those positions.

And it rejected a wholesale 20 per cent OMB budget slash from \$22 million to \$16 million, voting instead for a milder cut of \$2.6 million, that would leave the OMB funded at its present level.

The votes on the two bills—a White House personnel Authorization and a Treasury-Postal Service and general government appropriation—left the White House relatively unscathed. Though some members verbally vented their frustration with the "arrogance" of the White House staff and the "power-grabbing" OMB, the House showed little desire to strike back legislatively.

An amendment to the \$5.5 billion appropriations bill by Rep. Joseph Addabbo (D-N.Y.) to cut \$6 million from the OMB Budget was rejected 252 to 152. Addabbo called the OMB a "growing octopus with nine lives" and said it was "extending its tentacles into

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the policy levels of executive departments."

But Rep. Howard W. Robison (R-N.Y.) said the Addabbo cut would reduce OMB staff from its present 660 to 448. Without a congressional budget office ready to do the work, the cutback would be "irresponsible," Robison said. Minority Leader John Rhodes (R-Ariz.) called the Addabbo amendment "a meat ax" approach.

But immediately after Republicans and many Democrats combined to defeat Addabbo, they adopted, 287 to 104, an amendment by the fiscally conservative H.R. Gross (R-Iowa) to cut \$2.6 million out of the Appropriations Committee's recommendation for OMB, putting it at \$19.4 million. OMB had requested \$23.4 million.

The \$5.5 billion appropriations bill is \$69.3 million below the administration's request and \$753.7 million below the 1974 fiscal year appropriation, largely because disaster relief

funds are no longer in the bill and \$613.6 million for the GSA Public Buildings Service is no longer appropriated but is paid for by other government agencies.

The bill appropriates \$16.3 million for the salaries and expenses of the "White House staff, and provides for 30 additional positions, increasing the staff to 540.

A \$1.5 million appropriation for White House special projects, a fund OMB Director Roy L. Ash testified was being used to pay Mr. Nixon's lawyers, was left in the bill. Last year it was deleted.

The White House staff bill cuts from 14 to five the number who could be hired at \$42,500 a year, while increasing the high-level staff positions for the Vice President from six to 14.

The House rejected, 336 to 77, a move by Rep. J. J. Rickle (D-Tex.) to cut the number of White House staff above pay grade GS-15 (\$32,800) from 65 to 40.

Pickle said decision-making at the White House was being

transferred from agencies and departments to an inner circle of staff not accountable to Congress.

"If it continues to grow, the inner circle will be more powerful than the President," Pickle said.

Rep. Ed Derwinski (R-Ill.) retorted: "It is one thing to oppose policies of the President—many a good Republican opposes policies of President Nixon—but it is another thing to cripple the ability of the President to function."

Asked if the President might veto the bill, Rep. Thaddeus Dulski (D-N.Y.), chairman of the Post Office and Civil Service Committee, which reported out the bill, said, "If the President doesn't sign it, he's got nothing. I'm not bringing out any more legislation."

Dulski said the reduction amounted to "only about \$30,000 on a \$11.9 million bill. Why would he quibble over nine staff positions and \$30,000 when there's 550 at the White House now?"